DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 191 UD 013 217

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TITLE	Some Reactions to Employing Blacks. Illinois Studies of the Economically Disadvantaged, Technical Report Number 10.
INSTITUTION	Illinois Univ., Urbana. Dept. of Psychology.
SPONS AGENCY	Social and Rehabilitation Service (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	ISED-TR-10
PUB DATE	Jul 71
NOTE	31p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Administrative Problems; Caucasians; *Critical Incidents Method; Cultural Differences; Employee Attitudes; Employee Responsibility; *Employer Attitudes; *Employer Employee Relationship; *Employment Problems; Job Satisfaction; Middle Class; *Negro Students; Perception; Racial Differences; Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

During the summer of 1969, the authors, two white middle-class psychologists, employed two black assistants, both students at the University of Illinois and residents of the local community. This was done for two reasons. (1) They were involved in a larger project whose ultimate aim is to train both blacks and whites so that interracial interactions in employment settings lead to improved job tenure for black employees. The authors felt that to undertake such an enterprise without first-hand experience of some of the problems would be intellectually dishonest at least, and maladaptive, at worst. (2) Information was needed concerning interracial interactions in the community which only local black persons could obtain. This paper describes both their experiences as employers and summarizes information obtained from other employers and employees. First described and commented upon are some of the bureaucratic problems encountered. Then reported on are their views of the "stimulus," describing some aspects of the behavior of their two employees as it appeared to them in their employer roles. They add their reflections on these descriptions, on the information obtained by their assistants in their collection of critical incidents, and on their perception of their own responses. One of the black assistants commented upon the employers' reactions. His observations are included. (Author/JM)

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Illinois Studies of the Economically Disadvantaged

SOME REACTIONS TO EMPLOYING BLACKS

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Technical Report No. 10

July, 1971

This investigation was supported, in part, by Research Grant No. 12-P-55175/5
from the Social and Rehabilitation Service
Department of Health, Education and Welfare
Washington, D. C., 20201

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ED 013217

SOME REACTIONS TO EMPLOYING BLACKS[1]

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During the summer of 1969 two white middle-class psychologists employed two black assistants, both students at the University of Illinois and residents of the local community. We did this for two reasons: (1) we were involved in a larger project whose ultimate aim is to train both blacks and whites so that interracial interactions in employment settings lead to improved job tenure for black employees (Triandis & Malpass, 1971). We felt that to undertake such an enterprise without firsthand experience of some of the problems would be intellectually dishonest at least, and maladaptive, at worst. (2) Information was needed concerning interracial interactions in the community which only local black persons could obtain. We had work to accomplish. We did not hire these men merely to observe them. We were very much involved with their productivity. This paper describes both our experiences as employers and summarizes information obtained from other employers and employees.

The description of our experiences as employers of two young black men is solidly a product of our own cultural background. We make no apologies for this, nor did our black employees apologize for their cultural experiences. But the reader must understand that the behavior that we comment

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[1]The research reported here was supported by the Social and Rehabilitation Service of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Research Grant No. 12-P-55175/5 (Harry C. Triandis, Principal Investigator). We are grateful to Pola Triandis for her critical reading of an earlier version of this report.

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upon and the terms we use are too little the empirically derived concepts of a mature social science and too much the experientially derived concepts of naive intercultural employers. While we were aware that these men were different from assistants we had hired in the past, we did give them considerable autonomy, as we would other assistants. Their task was to collect "critical incidents," (Flanagan, 1954) concerning interracial interactions of persons from the black community of Champaign and Urbana, Illinois.

Respondents were interviewed regarding incidents which took place while they were interacting with an individual or individuals representative of a different cultural setting. In the incident selected for interviewing some aspect of the interaction differed from the respondents expectations or was not understandable and generally centered around the respondents' understanding or interpretation of the other's behavior. The major target population for our black assistants was to be young black males or females who were eligible to work or who had worked irregularly but could not find stable employment. They were to be largely high school dropouts with histories of chronic unemployment. The task for the research assistants was to locate respondents fitting this description, and persuade them to cooperate in the project by revealing incidents which had taken place in their interactions with "whitey." The way in which the assistants were to do this was left largely to their own discretion. They were asked to meet us in the office once or twice a week and bring completed protocols with them. They were provided with a short structured questionnaire for biographical data, but the major interview was to be largely unstructured.

We will first describe and comment on some of the bureaucratic problems encountered, then report on our view of the "stimulus," describing some aspects of the behavior of our two employees as it appeared

to us in our employer roles, and add our reflections on these descriptions, on the information obtained by them in their collection of critical incidents, and on our perception of our own responses. We shall refer to the two assistants as Mr. A and Mr. B. One of the black assistants commented on our reactions. His observations are indented.

On Entering the Bureaucratic Morass

Our major problems were with pay. The pay we offered was adequate, we thought, and was more than the going rate for student employment. We were very quickly informed, however, that they could get much higher pay elsewhere and that they were working for us partly because they thought what we were doing was worthwhile. This also justified taking somewhat lower pay than they could otherwise get. We knew it was probably true that they could do better elsewhere, but it made us feel good and we wanted to believe they were ego-involved with our project.

The second problem also concerned pay, but was much more difficult and persisted throughout the entire summer during which the two men were in our employ and came back to haunt us months later. At the University of Illinois, and we presume many other bureaucratic establishments, the payroll procedures require that an employee have a "grubstake" equivalent to one month's expenses. One enrolls at the personnel department, begins work, and after two weeks turns in a bi-weekly time card. This time card makes it way through the system and comes out as a check, two weeks later. The employee has thus been made to wait 28 days for one day's pay, 27 days for a second day's pay, etc., and a minimum of 28 days for any pay at all. If one lives in a system where there is no margin, where today's pay is for today's food (or even next week's food), the minimum 28 days delay is intolerable.

We went to the "system" through channels to obtain pay advances. We explained the situation to a bureaucrat, who was argumentative at first, explaining that it was the same for everybody, and then relented, while insisting that our arrangements be only for the "first period," after which money would be coming in at a regular rate, and everything would be okay. This is in error. It is okay only if the money spent during the "first period" is one's own, a cushion. If it has to be borrowed, then it must be paid back, and one finds oneself continually behind with consequences that are really quite troublesome and angering when they are not necessary. The greatest difficulty is the feeling that it is not necessary to be behind. Further it appears to be true that the bureaucracy is acting in its own self interest by not taking a chance (prepaying) or doing extra work (paying frequently), and the employee be damned.

There are ways to circumvent many bureaucratic practices, some of which are provided and maintained by the bureaucracy itself. One can continue to get a cash advance on the basis of a time card or a request from one's supervisor but these are temporary remedies. When requested again and again, the bureaucrats stop allowing the practice apparently for fear all employees will attempt to use this "emergency" route. One is then tempted to lie. For some University faculty members it is relatively easy to obtain small sums of money as a cash advance. But this can be done legally on only a very modest scale and again for relatively short periods of time. There seems to be no long-term way around the payment problems reported here, except for the employee developing a "cash cushion" out of his pay. It's hard to get ahead if you start even, let alone behind. Further, the maintenance of a devious system to circumvent bureaucracy requires a considerable amount of time, energy and ingenuity, and after a short time

becomes counterproductive for both the supervisor and the employee. It creates a constant source of friction, constant indebtedness on the part of the employee to the supervisor, and a consequent loss of the employee's freedom to criticize, disagree with or otherwise face his supervisor honestly. Further, it initiates a feeling of deviance and distrust emanating both from the payroll office towards the project and its employees and from the employees towards the bureaucracy. "Merely to be employed is work, even if you sit on your ass" is an apt description.

Some Critical Incidents

Incident: "We had arranged that both Mr. A and Mr. B would be quite autonomous, and not have to punch a time clock. We, in effect, guaranteed to pay the equivalent of a day's pay, but without them having to account for the time. The means of paying them was, however, through an employment office which keeps its books on an hourly basis only. We asked them to fill out a time card every two weeks and to fill it in on an eight-hour work day basis so that they could get paid. Two misunderstandings developed: (1) while they were asked to register at the Employment Office, it was some time before they got there. As a result their first pay period time cards were late, didn't get signed, and the first paycheck was delayed. Thus, it was necessary to use special procedures to obtain pay for them. This cost us time to arrange and maintain these procedures which furthermore created more difficulties with the University bureaucracy. (2) Mr. A and Mr. B resented the idea of being hourly employees instead of being salaried. They did not understand that they never were hourly employees in our eyes. There was no way to hire undergraduates as salaried employees so we handled their appointment as if they were salaried, instructing them to fill in an hourly time card as if they had been keeping time for a 40-hour week: they

were in effect salaried, as their pay was never contingent on their time spent or on their productivity. Either the "in effect" aspect of the situation was not acceptable in lieu of "actually" being salaried, or they never grasped the fact that the time card was a mere formality." (RSM)

Comment: At the time we viewed the mix-up about the first time card as being due to their failure to show up at the Student Employment Office. The special arrangements that we had to make for their pay as a result of their falling behind began to be a very unwelcome burden, as we took a lot of pressure to stop doing favors. On the other hand, University procedures are arbitrarily rigid, lockstepped, and seem to be enforced out of a fear that exceptions will force a major administrative reorganization.

Incident: "I had a 9:30 appointment with Mr. A. Knowing the problem he had with transportation I arranged the day before to stop by and pick him up about 9:15. When I got there his mother said that she thought he was at the restaurant having breakfast. I told her I would drop back in about 15 minutes. When I returned, she informed me that he was on his way to the office. I drove on to the office and shortly after I arrived, he walked in. I asked him why he didn't wait for me to pick him up and he merely said that he had decided to walk instead.

"He very seldom arrived at the office at the time designated for a meeting. I never emphasized a specific time but would suggest we meet about 9:30 to 10:00 (realizing his transportation problem). Sometimes it was as late as 11:30 before he arrived. He never made any comment about why he was delayed. I didn't say anything to him about being punctual as I did not consider it that big an issue myself.

"On several occasions Mr. A appeared at the office in the morning when we had not scheduled a meeting. It seems that he would arrive earlier on those occasions. Twice the secretary phoned about 10:00 to tell us he was in the office waiting." (JS)

Incident: "One incident which we have since observed with other young black men struck us as strange. Mr. A appeared in the office one morning for a meeting and had brought a friend with him. This friend was not involved in the project and to our knowledge was not assisting in the gathering of data. We believe they had just casually met on the street and Mr. A invited him to come along. We felt it was strange and that we would not have done the same thing in A's position. We might have invited him to come with us, but either we would have asked him to wait outside or in another office until we were through with the meeting and discussion of the project, or the question of his presence would not have arisen and he would have simply asked to remain outside. We did not take offense but thought it was strange, this apparent lack of separation of work and social role behavior. The friend came right into the office, sat down after he had been introduced and stayed for the duration of the meeting." (JS)

Incident: Mr. A came in after some weeks during which he had written some notes and comments on earlier reports. He was working on a consulting basis, and the daily rate was relatively steep. We had in mind about 2 days work, but this was never made explicit in the beginning. When he came in, he had a sheaf of notes and a friend with him. I looked over the notes and really had no way to estimate how much time was spent on the task. When he was asked, he said he worked 3 1/2 days. This seemed out of line and under the pressure of the moment, I questioned the amount of time and we settled on a payment based on less time. All this took place in the presence of the friend. I don't know what the friend was there for. It may have been that Mr. A simply didn't know how, or didn't feel it important, to park his friend outside in the hall while he and I talked, or it may be that he wanted his friend's presence to pressure me into paying for more than was really justified.

I believe the former is more nearly the case. On the other hand, I felt constrained and annoyed and made what I later considered to be the incorrect decision. It was incorrect because it was based on a presumption of dishonesty. Whether I caught him in an attempt to run a game on me, or I insulted him unjustly in front of a friend, no one on the project has seen him during the six-month period following the incident. (RSM)

Incident: "Mr. B left working for us to go to summer camp for the National Guard for two weeks. He did not come in to sign a time sheet before he left, and when he returned he did not come in to say he was back and would again begin work, or to ask if there had been a change in plans or tasks. We had seen very little of him even when meetings were scheduled and strongly suspected he was doing nothing, and taking us for our money. We terminated his employment soon after he was back in town, but had not shown up to talk with us. He then came in to collect pay for the work he had done before leaving town. He also implied that we owed him for more time than we had paid him. We checked that carefully and considered that we had paid what was due. He prolonged that problem for some time, raising the question a number of times. We felt then that he was trying to get more money for no effort, let alone productivity. We felt that he hadn't come close to earning what he had already gotten and hadn't given us any reasons why he wasn't producing. He almost never came in to report or to discuss his work, and we could not reach him anywhere. His avoiding us seemed to indicate to us that he would just see how far he could go before we fired him. He was always very prompt about picking up his paycheck or time slips. We still think he "suckered" us." (RSM)

Some Reflections

The "critical incident" technique (Flanagan, 1954) has been useful as a means of gathering information about areas of critical misunderstanding between people of different cultures. The assistants collected incidents from unemployed blacks in Champaign and a white male (JS) collected incidents from white employers of blacks and also from white and black teenage participants in a job training program. Examination of these incidents reveals that most of the incidents from unemployed blacks reflect structural difficulties they had entering and remaining in the job market, such as lack of union acceptance and poor transportation facilities, rather than behavioral misunderstandings. White employers who were able to supply incidents overwhelmingly emphasized alleged unreliability of the black employee, specifically come to work late or not showing up at all and not phoning in. Other than that, the white employers reported very few behavioral problems or misunderstandings of black employees. It may be that the interaction problems between blacks and whites are not sufficiently gross to be readily verbalized by either. Several blacks suggested that they did not like working for whites, but were unable or unwilling to verbalize cogent reasons.

The following reflections are in response to both our own experiences as employers of black men and to the reports of both employers and employees obtained through the critical incident interviews. The discussion is arranged by topic, with comments of one of the two black assistants interspersed and indicated by indentation. References to "black employees" should be understood as a reference to young black males of low socio-economic standing and with a sporadic employment record in the local community. There are, of course, many other black employees for whom our discussion is totally irrelevant.

Time and Involvement

There is probably a difference in values associated with apparent lack of concern for punctuality by black employees. It could also be that the kinds of jobs they do are not the kind that inspire a person to show up for them, that what they have to do is not really very stimulating. Why go to a lot of trouble for a job that's not interesting and is very often only temporary. If the job were good, or if they felt they had a chance for advancement, they might show up more often and there wouldn't be a problem. Compared to other things a young black ghetto man can do which are interesting to him, the job may be dull. This raises the questions of what are the primary activities in the ghetto and how do people spend their time when they are not working, e.g., in forms of "recreation," working at survival, or some mixture? Another problem is created if you have to change peer groups when you get a job or the rest of your buddies don't have one. You may no longer be a member of that reference group. A guy will go to work and come back at 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon and find out that he missed something that he wanted to be a part of.

> There is a distinct and definite difference in values or norms for blacks as opposed to whites. Whereas a white might be content with the old philosophy of working steadily and dilligently on a job until he has acquired a home, a car and savings, the black man, especially those who are unmarried, have different objectives. One factor that might be a cause for the lack of staying steadily employed could be that on most jobs there is little or no chance for advancement, plus the fact that most often the highest level or position attainable by blacks is a menial one, in comparison to most.
>
> The most important factor to consider, however, is that most young blacks reject the old philosophy and replace it with one more applicable to their life style, which is, live for today! For example, if all that one really wants is a nice car, one need only get a fairly decent paying job and work enough days per week and enough hours per day

> to cover immediate expenses. Those might include the car note, the rent and possibly, the groceries. This tends to limit the number of financial obligations one has to meet and at the same time, one can still acquire the material things on a limited basis.
>
> Changing jobs does not necessarily eliminate one from his peer groups. If the one who changes jobs does not lose his ability to relate to his old buddies, he remains accepted. It is not unusual for a black to disassociate himself from other blacks for fear of losing his job. But quite noticeably also, the most successful blacks of today are those who relate best to other blacks. Like the guy who goes to work and feels he's missing something, often the referse is true; missing work and nothing happens.

One of the bigger problems seems to be not that the black employees fail to show up but that they quite often don't notify the employer that they aren't going to come. This is a departure from expectation and may reflect a difference in norms or a lack of knowledge of normative requirements. It may also involve not knowing the effects this kind of behavior can have on future employment prospects. The employee may be perfectly justified in not returning to work after a day or two, since the job is uninteresting, the pay is too low and he doesn't like his coworkers. But the fact that he doesn't go back and doesn't inform the employers of his decision, will go down on his record. He may not realize this. Maybe he doesn't care. But it is certainly a factor in his future employability.

> There are several reasons why blacks don't phone in or notify of their absence. The primary reason for not phoning in is because the white employers are seeking too much information from the employee about his absence, thereby invading the black man's privacy. For whatever reason a man takes off, it should remain personal.
>
> Since there is a difference in norms, it is wrong to assume that one set is acceptable and one is not. For instance, a black employer would most likely know the sorts of behavioral patterns common among blacks, and would not find a particular situation offensive, whereas a white employer might. I agree that blacks often jeopardize their jobs, but if white employers gain a more thorough knowledge of the life styles of blacks, and are willing to accept them, these misunderstandings will not continue to exist.

> The phone is not always easily accessible to blacks. Many, who have no phone of their own, will ask permission from their neighbors to use their phone numbers when needed to apply for jobs, or for leaving messages. This is fine until the neighbor becomes perturbed by the frequency of calls for others, or too many neighbors are taking advantage of one phone. Consequently, ghetto landlords have installed pay phones in their houses.

This raises the question of use of communication means. For example, What is the frequency of phone use? Are people easily accessible by telephone? Are they typically at home? Are telephones readily accessible? If there is overcrowding, we might expect people to leave the high density settings and go somewhere else. If that occurs frequently, then the telephone will be used less often as the major means of communication. There seem to be many more forms of informal communication in the ghettoes than outsiders commonly realize. One implication is that people would make the rounds of settings to pick up the "messages" that are left for them, taking an inventory of what's gone on during the day. A value should then be placed on being in touch with what is going on. Another relevant issue concerns the distribution of interest and attention over community-wide, state-wide and nation-wide information. For example, one might expect black radio stations to have relatively little news of any kind except highly local and highly setting specific.

> The suspicion that is created by one who must use a pay phone can be costly. One employee who called in sick, on a pay phone in a nearby business establishment, caused his employer to think he was partying and not really sick. The boss made a return call, using the number that was listed on the employee's record; after being told that the fellow was not there, the supervisor recommended suspension. This necessitated the employee telling the supervisor that the number he had listed was his neighbors, and not his own. This is a typical incident that could have been avoided had the supervisor only been a little more knowledgeable of the conditions that are prevalent in most black and poor neighborhoods.

> The implication suggesting that "people would make the rounds of settings..." is true. More specifically, one might ask that messages be left for him at the various places he goes regularly; the pool room, barber shop, tavern, etc.

A Problem of Persistence?

Our black assistants had a great deal of autonomy. They were doing a job we assumed would be highly interesting to them. But autonomy itself was not the problem. Rather it was a lack of realistic and explicit productivity expectations. That was our mistake. But at times there was a lack of feedback to us, a lack of communication. The job was going badly, although it wasn't their fault. They weren't getting cooperation from respondents. However, they didn't seem to work and refused to come in for conferences. There was perhaps a conflict between how they were going and the kind of expectations we had of them. Perhaps they thought that we expected them to do the job effectively and if they couldn't handle it or if things were not going well for them, this would be an indictment of themselves.

Mr. A was committed to the job and told us on a number of occasions that he took the job because he thought he was going to do something important. Perhaps there is reluctance on the part of young black men, whether they are college students or not, to admit that the job isn't going well. Perhaps they expect that Whitey will say, "Well, what can you expect?" Such an attitude would make it very difficult for them to give the kind of feedback that would indicate difficulties and lack of cooperation. One wonders to what extent they are used to being told what to do, doing it, and avoiding further attention. When they are put in a position in which they are expected to treat white men as peers, they may find that difficult to do.

We did ask Mr. A to tell us if he thought we were wrong. Although he did so and probably saw that we accepted his criticism, when we asked him specifically, we think he wouldn't have volunteered it. Of course, all this doesn't necessarily indicate a black-white difference.

> The autonomy was necessary to maintain the working relationship with the psychologists in the office and the interviewers in the field. There could have been a little more specificity pertaining to job expectations along with the autonomy. Then perhaps when things weren't going so well, we would not have been so reluctant to admit it.
>
> If a person really digs a job and wants to do well, he is not likely to admit he's having difficulty, college students and non-college students alike. Our situation was not the usual work situation. Our feedback or productivity varied daily. There was no true measuring device for the amount of productivity since we were turning out information and not cars, etc. The reluctancy on my part to disclose why we were having so much difficulty getting interviews was due largely to the types of explanations that would follow in order to clarify our predicament. Like explaining the situation in the North End in more detail that I chose to, but felt it was necessary in order that the psychologists realize our obstacles. On the other hand, if it were any other type of job, and the problem would have been something like difficulty in getting to work because of personal intimidation, that could have been much more easily explained. This should further explain why information was volunteered. Besides it always seemed to be a little more significant when the "big wheels" were aware of the probable difficulties and would occasionally take a professional and personal interest by asking about them.

Competence

The competence concept (White, 1959) may be relevant to the idea of "being cool." Specifically, it may be bad to show that you are not in control of the situation. Discrimination is probably a strong threat to self esteem. Any admission of failure or lack of competence must be more aversive in groups which are discriminated against. A general tendency may be to try to get across to Whitey that "since black is beautiful, we

are rising above the white man." Whenever the black employee finds himself incapable of coping with a situation, finding out what the situation is and what other people in it are thinking, he may feel that expressing doubt shows a weakness to whitey that he doesn't want to reveal. It's hard to admit lack of understanding since it reflects on social and personal competence. There's a similar problem in giving task instructions. If an employer or investigator wants feedback that evaluates procedures, he should make feedback, especially negative feedback, easy to occur. This might be an appropriate occasion for using a "shill" to initiate negative feedback in a group setting.

> Whitey is not the one the black man is attempting to impress, but rather himself. No one wants to reveal a weakness in himself. If it is a competitive thing between blacks and whites, then it is usually to show other blacks what can be done.

Money

Money, especially relatively small amounts, does not seem to be the universal motivator among blacks that it has seemed to be among whites. If you were to look at the young black ghetto man's time that has some monetary outcome, it might be relatively low. The question then becomes how much money is enough. The black students who did things for us or were asked to work as subjects seem to have required considerably more money than white university students, and even then they did not seem terribly interested in the money. An economic ratio may be involved.

Clothes seem very important to the young black man. This is expensive and a lot of clothes require more money than the average college student would spend. We get the impression that many young black men do try to resemble, if not a Playboy male model, then at least some kind of sartorial fashion plate.

We also found that there was a large amount of sharing of money. If one man has money and the others (in his peer group) don't, then he shares, and if he is the only one with money, he pays for whatever the group wants to do. Much evidence suggests that the ghetto is a jungle and that people lock everything up and protect their own goods. But there is also this other idea of sharing that may make it less advantageous for a black person to accumulate wealth the way a white person does. Working to put money in the bank, or in bonds, may not be the norm among blacks.

This leads into the concept of ingroup-outgroup that Triandis, Vassiliou and Nassiakou (1968) emphasized. Within the ingroup sharing is the norm, but not in the outgroup, which may even include the apartment dwellers around you in an apartment house. That is probably a relevant concept in the ghetto.

> I'm in agreement with most of this but your money sharing concept is not accurate. For example, a tight knit group of six men will not concern themselves with who's spending, eventually they all will. No one is ever coerced into spending.

The economic concept of margin may be useful here. If one is concerned with the proportional advance towards a goal or towards some fixed level, a smaller amount will obtain the same proportional increase for the person already close to the goal. But for the lower class black man who is far away from the desired level, a small marginal increase isn't worth as much effort. You can't do a great deal with $5 so why not just gamble it, say, in an ingroup pool and go for a large haul? If you lose, the money still stays within the same group. A marginal loss of $5 is not noticeable in terms of the percentage it takes you away from the goal. But the marginal increase of getting five times that from the pool is an acceptable and valuable move towards some higher level, e.g., parity.

There may also be class/ethnic differences in the allocation of the marginal dollar that have implications for the attainment of different goals. In general, money goes first for necessities (food, lodging, transportation), then for luxuries, and finally for surpluses (investments). Economists know (Samuelson, 1970) that low income people spend a larger proportion of their income on necessities than do persons of higher income. This means that a larger share of the marginal dollar goes to unexciting things like paying the grocery bill or debts. The marginal utility of a dollar at a low level of resources is lower because it cannot buy real luxuries but only switches you from eating beans to eating peas. In the middle income levels, a 10% change in income means a real change in lifestyle (e.g., from a summer to a winter vacation). Even if one considers absolute dollars instead of percentages, $100 probably brings one closer to one's goal if one is in the middle class than if one is in the lower class. This assumes that goals are more similar than lifestyles, as compared with the assumption that goals are proportional deviations from the person's current position.

This may be relevant to alleged unrealiability. When a person doesn't show up for work, he loses money. Even the sum of $20 a day does not seem to be a sufficiently powerful motivator to get him away from what he would rather be doing, whether it is recovering from a hangover, functioning with a peer group, or attending to personal business. This may indicate that the alternatives are more important, but doesn't tell us whether the $20 is important in any absolute sense. It is not unusual for a black employee to miss one day a week from work. Given the ghetto culture, is the pay from four days work enough of an economic stake from which to organize more? It might be that in one day a week he can make up more than he loses, either in money or in more valuable returns, such as local prestige.

The kicks or the freedom that he gets on the one day that he doesn't work may be more important than the money he would get for working. This conceptualization implies that an exchange model may be useful. The employee can exchange money and time for local prestige, or he may exchange equality for freedom (in a short run-immediate sense). When important goals are not being met by his job situation, he incurs some costs there (by not showing up, losing pay and approval) in the service of goal attainment in other environments. This in turn is based on the assumption that there are interesting and/or important things going on in the neighborhood, or on the street. The white employer knows almost nothing about life in the ghetto in general, and is particularly ignorant about what activities occur during the day that may compete with work. We also don't yet know the degree to which time off the job is needed "merely" for survival in the ghetto environment and social system.

> Having been without material things for so long, the question arises, why be greedy and selfish? This is what has the white man hung up, so why should we fall into the same bag?
>
> Most of the discussion about the reasons for missing work, more interesting things to do, is true. It should be noted, however, that for every individual who misses a day's work, each has his own reason.

Initiative

If we study the mapping of trait names onto observed behavior, an activity suggested by Attribution Theory (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967), we find the frequently reported observation that black employees often do one unit of work and then wait to be instructed before doing anything else. That looks like a lack of "initiative." We should consider what initiative means behaviorally. Is it "initiative," or the lack of it, or a different interpretation of what the job should entail or what kinds

of behaviors are suitable for a job that leads the white employer to devalue the black employees performance? An example is the black employee who worked at a lathe, turning out machine parts until there were no more machine parts to be turned out. He then sat down or disappeared from the job, leaving shavings around for the janitor to clean up. He may have defined his job as "I am a machinist, I don't do janitor work." So he had a different kind of definition of job behavior than the foreman. The white machinist not only turns out the machine parts but keeps his work area clean. We're not suggesting that black workers don't keep things clean, but are using this as an example of the critical incidents reported. A similar example is the case of a black mechanic in an automobile shop who wouldn't sweep up his equipment bay since he was hired as a mechanic and considered janitorial work beneath him. Rather than a lack of initiative, this may be a conflict in job expectations. It also looks like a strong unwillingness to please or ingratiate the foreman or boss.

Another situation which can be called lack of initiative, occurs when the employee finishes a job. If there is no clean up work or lower status work to do, instead of asking the boss, he waits for the boss to come to him and give him another assignment. This is a common occurrence in organized labor and is institutionalized in many union shops. Black employees particularly may expect to be <u>told</u> what to do next and not be able to <u>discuss</u> what they should be doing.

We also find that there is another way of interpreting the observation of apparent lack of initiative. If there is four hours work, rather than stretching it out to fill up 8 hours, he will do it in four and then leave rationalizing, "I could have done it in 8 hours and gotten paid for it, why shouldn't I finish the job in 4 hours and get paid the same?" He does

not ask what he should do next. The white person interprets this as lack of initiative. If the black employee sees a white doing the same work in 8 hours, he will say that Whitey is lazy and a lousy worker, while he sees himself as a good one, who can do it in four. That raises the issue of maintaining the job rate as a non-competitive agreement, and the question of whether the black employees would enter into such an agreement if it were made explicit. One also wonders if the black employees who say, "Okay, I'll do the job and then go home" understand that if they did this frequently, the job would be redefined and that twice as much work in a day would be expected so that the rate for the job would go down.

There is also the question of whether one hires the ability to do a job or an employees presence for so many hours. Many may believe they are hired to do a specific task rather than to be present and "at work" for a period of time. This may be a reaction to the connotation of slavery, or personal ownership, of selling your time and submitting to the orders of another. It may also reflect a naive ethnocentrism of the black employee.

The marginally employed are rarely hired for what they already do well. They are most frequently hired to do a job that anybody could do. Due to differential skill levels and lack of training, regardless of how those differentials are developed, most black ghetto dwellers do not have a "thing" for which they are hired.

> The "initiative" or "lack of initiative" situation can be remedied. If the employer clearly specifies the job description at the initial employment stages, any repercussions following would be due to the employees rejecting the work or failing to perform up to par. (Who determines what par should be, employee or employer?)
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> Also you seem to be confusing initiative with work continuity. Initiative is rather the efforts put forth to complete a particular job, it ends there. Initiative

> or lack of it, cannot be determined when a man finishes a job, does it well, and does not run to the supervisor looking for work.
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> On some jobs, one man has been known to be singled out repeatedly to perform some menial task when the work is slack, (usually a black who is not in good graces with his supervisor). If this is true, as it so often is, it shows why one would not volunteer his services or seek additional work. It is definitely not a matter of "waiting to be told what to do," but rather not being willing to aid in one's own victimization.

Different jobs offer different degrees of freedom. For instance, truck driving is often looked upon as a preferred job among young black men (Liebow, 1967). It may be that a truck driver can budget his time to suit himself to a greater degree than an assembly line worker. Of course, truck drivers get paid more money and are not under the perpetual gaze of the boss. By the same criterion, bus driving seems to be a higher status job for the high school dropout or a kid that has just finished high school. To come right out of school at that age and get a job driving a bus or a truck is "real cool." You keep drier and warmer than you would doing other jobs, and you also get around and see what is going on. Many problems of "initiative" and "motivation" seem situationally determined and center on the kinds of jobs that are available. A person restricted to the kinds of opportunities that are only available to blacks would also lack initiative and motivation.

> Don't confuse or stereotype a high status job as one with freedom. There's more to it. It must allow freedom and self-respect. This excludes truck or bus driving for most blacks. The job must be desirable and have potential for advancement.

(Triandis, Feldman, & Harvey [1971b] find that ghetto blacks prefer variable jobs with a future, e.g., waiter.)

Conformity with peers or ingroup. When black persons disagree with each other, they often seem careful to show that they can understand the other person's point of view, but at the same time they want to suggest something else. We see in Cleaver's open letter to Carmichael (Cleaver, E., The Black Panther, August 16, 1969) that he found that a great many black people who helped "screw things up" for some blacks and that you can't bring them all under one umbrella, as Carmichael wants to do. But as long as Whitey is around there is a pretense at unity. Further, if there is a group of his peers present, the black man will serve the requirements of the peer group in preference to those of the employer or supervisor.

In trying to get black employees to maintain their job situation, is it advisable to break down peer arrangements? Should one not have peers nearby on the job where a black employee may be required to do the kinds of things he wouldn't want his peers to see him doing (things not considered cool) like being deferent to the boss or cleaning up the work space with a broom? Many black employees may not be part of the "cool" culture. Further, the list of things you don't want to let your peer group see you do would be quite different. These differences may very well be large enough not to justify generalizations about black employees.

> In relation to the peer group, the blacks seldom, unless pressured financially, accept a job that would create personal embarrassment among their peers. Since they are a minority of people, they may not have any other blacks on the same shift or same department.

In one apprenticeship program some black employees just aren't making it while others, according to the white employers, are really producing. Listening to some of the white employers, one gets the impression they are making it because they are acting like "good little whites," although they aren't necessarily Uncle Toms. Those in this apprenticeship

program are handpicked. The fact that they are handpicked and that a large percentage are having problems, suggest that the problem of work orientation or apparent lack of initiative is very common.

> The apprenticeship programs are a farce unless they guarantee a trainee a permanent job. The black trainees know this. Based on this knowledge, plus the harrassment they receive from veteran journeymen, it is obvious that those who do best are those who are passive, or as was appropriately stated, act as "good little whites." Besides, the white trainees feel they will get a job.

Why are they seen as problem employees? Because they don't come in, don't phone when they're not going to come in, come in late, don't "take initiative" on the job? One report described an apprentice painter who was taken out on a job. The foreman told him what to paint. When he finished he walked away. When the foreman went to look for him, he was about a hundred yards away sitting in a field. The foreman called him back and asked him what he was doing. The black painter said, "I finished what you told me to do and I wanted to see what was going on over here." This seems a frequent kind of problem in the apprenticeship program. When the boss asks him if he really wants to be a painter, he will say, "Yeah, sure," and yet he will not show the kinds of behavior that will help him become a painter, when "painter" is a category that includes more than painting skills. It seems that he had not accepted the informal norms for the job. For instance, rather than wearing the white coveralls "uniform" of the painters, he was coming to work in blue jeans, sweatshirt and sneakers. In a number of ways the foreman and the other painters suggested to him that he dress more like a painter. One painter gave him a pair of shoes that were his size, he wore them for a couple of days and then went back to his sneakers. He was told that he didn't look like a painter...these kinds of informal pressures were brought to bear on him, but did not seem to have any effect. He had

been an apprentice for a year and a half and had not accepted the informal norms of the peer group. It seems that the white work group is not a peer group to him. He wants to paint, but not be a "painter."

> The whole idea of conforming turns most blacks around. Like the apprentice painter who wouldn't dress "properly." Whatever his reason(s) may have been for his behavior, it had no bearing on his ability to paint, nor did it accurately prove that he did not desire to be a good painter. If the uniforms were furnished it would be an entirely different situation.

The authoritarian-deferential structure of white society may be a major problem. The lower class black society may be much more equalitarian, as suggested by Griffin (1961). Is this supported by data on social class? Do middle-class blacks deprecate lower-class blacks to the same degree that a middle-class white would? There is a certain amount of conflict about this in the literature. Several studies (See Symonds, 1969) indicate that those most opposed to integrated housing are the middle-class blacks. However, there are fairly recent studies that indicate this may not be the case, that middle-class blacks tend to be more accepting of all blacks.

Retrospect

Compiling these reactions has underscored the feeling we had all along, that we and our employees were not participating in the same relationship. Not that they did not understand that we were the employers and they the employees; clearly any employment relationship is in some degree asymmetrical. Rather, there were important aspects of the relationship which we saw and valued that they did not, and vice versa. While these aspects are unclear, we feel certain that they are related to our mutual lack of understanding of some behavior. We all lacked the context necessary to interpret the behavior of others, and in which we would choose the means to accomplish the effects we intend. This is to say that we and our employees had different

expectations, norms, values, attitudes, associations, (Campbell [1963] lists 76 similar terms under the general heading of acquired behavioral dispositions). The antecedents of such differences lie in differences in social experience. To examine differences in expectations and to understand their implication one could take a point of view that might be called "behavioral ecology," and investigate the contexts (stimulus environments) and consequences (environmental attainments) of particular classes of behavior in the behavioral environments from which come the interacting persons. In addressing this task one confronts a hoary issue of cross-cultural research: Is the behavior we observe in some sense "in" the same dimensional system as our own behavior, with only the labels being rearranged, or is the dimensional system different? There is some evidence now that the dimensional system is highly similar between whites and blacks (Triandis, Feldman, Harvey, 1970; 1971a, b, c) and some that these systems are different in important ways (Ayer, in progress). If the systems are highly similar the task of research into the specific contacts within the system between any specified groups is made much easier. Triandis and Malpass (1970) describe some procedures for beginning such investigations and the results are contained in the reports referred to above (Triandis et al, 1970; 1971a, b, c).

Anthropologists and linguists use the concept of appropriateness whereas psychologists typically do not. Frake (1964) differentiates an anthropological enterprise from a psychological one by pointing out that psychologists aspire to predict the occurrence of a particular behavior emitted by a given person, while the anthropologist aspires to predict what set of behaviors will be seen as appropriate or acceptable by persons observing the emitted behavior. To return to the example of the black apprentice who became a painter in skill but not in appearance, understanding

of such situations might be made easier if investigation aspired to ascertain the set of acceptable behaviors and the consequences of certain categories of possible but unacceptable behaviors. The richness of the list of acceptable behaviors itself might be an important cue to the sensitiveness of interactions in given situations: the smaller the list, the most important it is to be inside the acceptable region, and the more negative the consequences of not being there. One implication might be that this is an area of strong normative expectation. Another that it is an area in which there are no explicit norms, but merely high uniformity of practice. These should probably be differentiated and may have different classes of consequences associated with "unacceptable" behavior.

Many of the problems in employing marginally employable people can be dealt with directly by the relatively simple but profoundly educative process of coming to understand the tasks of daily survival in the environments from which the employees come, their economic condition and needs, and the magnitude of the obstacles to be overcome just to show up for work or even to call in sick. To go further, however, probably requires a very broad base of social experience that would take a great deal of time and effort, and would not perhaps yield generalizations with validity and policies with effectiveness even if every employer were to attempt its acquisition. General methods of gathering, organizing and evaluating such information, described by Triandis and Malpass (1970) are a step towards systematic surrogates for the individual's direct social experience. They could be supplemented by efforts of industrial personnel to gather additional social experience in real environment settings. Other techniques with less exclusively verbal content can be developed as well. Taken together, these can yield packages of social experience that are relatively efficient and

which in principle should help to provide interpretive contexts within which persons of different social experience can attempt to understand each other's behavior, and behave adaptively. The utility of such information in mediating the interactions of persons from different backgrounds, operating in the industrial environment is yet to be evaluated. An attempt to provide such social experience by means of "cultural assimilators" is described by Fiedler, Mitchell and Triandis (1971). The degree to which accommodation can be given to special groups is variable and the means of assimilating such information into work settings are as yet unspecified. It may be that the demands of flexibility and effort are too great and that other, extra work-environment events are prerequisites to the improvement of the situation of the marginally employable. These remain empirical questions.

Now what of our theoretical repetoire in social psychology? What can it offer toward an analysis of the situations described here. It can offer concepts, and analytic procedures, which really amount to pointing our analyses to relations that may exist among certain variables. There is, however, a problem of relevance. It seems characteristic of research in the service of theory testing that the most favorable grounds are chosen for a test of a theory against its alternatives. Further, the testing grounds are often, and properly, not in the same specific sub-classes of settings, events or phenomena that the theory was initially invented to explain. The result is that the research on theories that appear to be potentially relevant analytic schemes for natural phenomena often appears stilted and "irrelevant."

In general, theories can encounter their own invalidity in deductive research, but not their own irrelevance. However, when beginning with natural phenomena, one seeks analytic systems, or conceptual heuristics that

will be fruitful in understanding phenomena, or which address the domains of the phenomena even metaphorically, and may find many theoretical formulations of potential importance. Indeed, the problem is not that they are irrelevant, but in the demands they impose on the specificity and completeness of our observations. For example, for us to even begin to use decision theory to understand the choice behavior of our two assistants in accepting our offer of a position, we would have to know in detail what alternatives were available to them, what aspects of the job they attended to, the degree they valued each of these alternatives, the outcomes of accepting and rejecting these alternatives, and the likelihoods and values of the various outcomes given the choice of the various alternatives. Further we would want to speculate about what outcome variables were to be maximized. It is not the case that decision theory is not relevant. It is super-relevant. It is not useful, however, given the resources available. The theory is so elaborated that in order to use the detail of it, and the analytic power, one has to have it in mind early, and to collect the information the theory requires for its operation. We are coming to the theoretical cafeteria with vague and diverse tastes, none of which add up to the culinary packages of which the chefs are capable. Yet at a level of generalization greater than that necessary for a detailed test or application of theories to the phenomena in which we are interested, a large number of theoretical systems suggest general classes of relationships that we should be alert for, as we observe.

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